

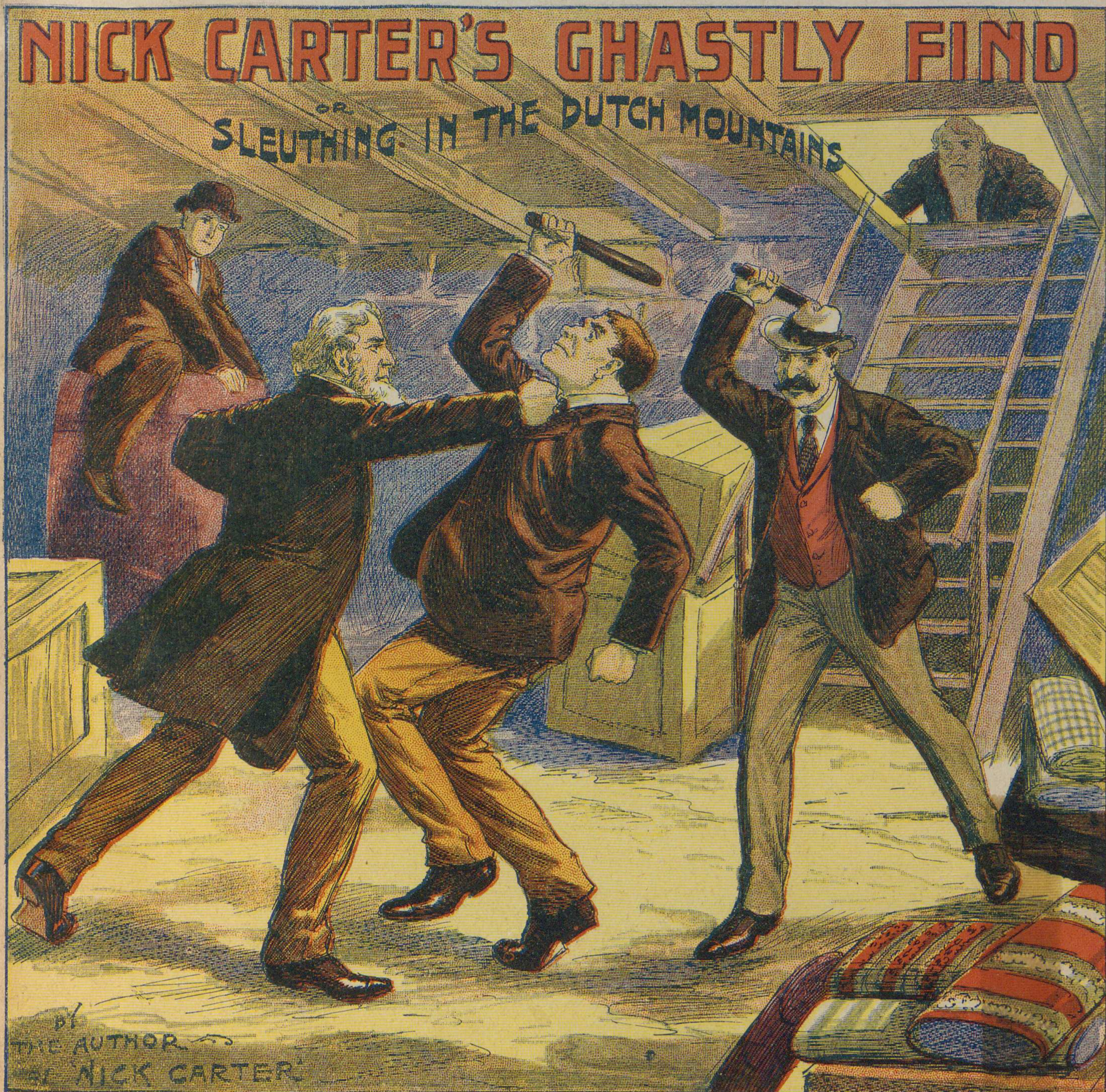


NICK CARTER WEEKLY

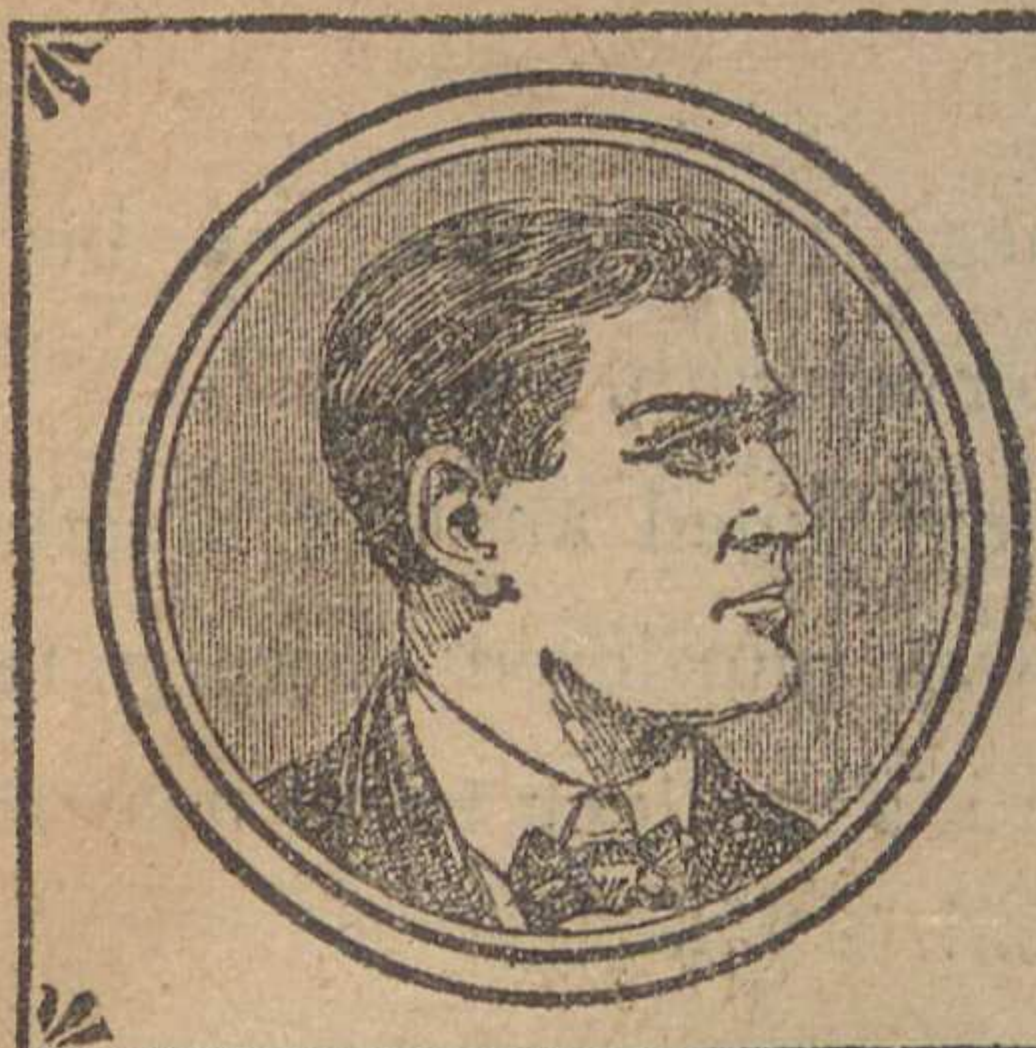
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THE TWO BULLIES SPRANG UPON THE TRANSFORMED CUSTOMER, BUT ONE WENT DOWN UNDER A TERRIFIC BLOW.



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NEW YORK, August 9, 1902.

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NICK CARTER'S GHASTLY FIND;

OR,

Sleuthing in the Dutch Mountains.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A GHASTLY FIND.

"And from that day to this no one has looked upon the face of poor Jacob Marks."

Two teamsters, sitting in the barroom of a way-side tavern in the Dutch mountain district of Pennsylvania, ceased their low conversation as the speaker raised his voice above the noise of the room.

One of the teamsters seemed to take only a careless interest in the remark.

The other was plainly excited almost beyond control.

The cooler man of the two laid his hand on his companion's arm, as though to prevent him from calling out.

"Restrain yourself," he said, "and listen."

"Do they think he was murdered?"

The question came from a member of the little group gathered about the first speaker.

"Yes," was the almost whispered reply; "he was last seen alive in company with two strange Jewish peddlers, and I have heard that officers have been looking for those two men."

"Have they been found?"

"No; and that's the strangest part of it. No one can tell who they were, or which way they went."

The excited teamster reached under the table and grasped his companion by the knee.

"For Heaven's sake," he whispered, "let me ask the man a few simple questions."

"Open your mouth," said the other, without turning his head or seeming to move his lips, "and I drop the case right here."

Nick Carter's most intimate friend would not have recognized him in the shabby teamster.

The shabby beard on his face was the product of nature, for he had been in the mountain districts of Pennsylvania nearly two weeks, searching for a missing man—for the man whose name the loungee at the other end of the barroom had just mentioned.

His companion was the brother of the man, whose trail he had thus far followed so unsuccessfully.

"And they were near this place when last seen?" asked one of the listeners, with a little shiver of fear as he thought of the mile of lonely road which lay between the ruddy lights of the tavern and his own home.

"Yes," was the reply; "they were climbing the mountain road just beyond the turn when neighbor Brown passed them."

"It's strange that this never came out before," said one of the little group.

"Brown never heard until to-day that poor Marks was missing. He don't leave home only about once a month."

"There was snow on the ground on the eighteenth of March, when Marks disappeared," said one of the listeners, "and I'd like to know whether there were any tracks from the crossroad to the haunted house. Has any one been out that way since then?"

"I haven't, for one," was the reply, "and, what's more, I don't propose to go out that way."

"Them's my sentiments," said a sullen-looking giant of a man who sat near the fire with a glass of whisky in his hand. "I wouldn't go near the haunted house for the best farm in the State."

"What's the matter with the haunted house?" asked Nick.

"It's death to go near it," replied the burly farmer, "and that's matter enough, I think."

"You see, stranger," explained another member of the group, "a man was murdered there a few years ago, and since then it's bad luck to go near the place."

"There are lights in the windows nights when there's not a soul on hand to make 'em," said another, "and whoever sees those lights dies before the end of the year."

"Where is this mysterious house?" asked Nick, arising to his feet, with a yawn.

"About a mile beyond that crossroad," replied one of the men, pointing out into the inky darkness of the April night.

"It's a rough place to get at," said another. "There's no road or path within a mile of it."

"Well," said Nick, "I guess I won't try to get to it to-night."

The two seeming teamsters left the room, and were in their own apartment in a moment.

"A clew at last!"

Nick placed the candle on the small stand as he spoke, and looked keenly at his companion.

"I am afraid so," said the other, sadly.

The detective stepped to the window, shaded his eyes from the candlelight with his hands, and looked out.

There were still patches of snow on the ground, and the treetops were bending and twisting before a strong wind.

"It's a rough night," he said, "but I think we'd better make the trip to-night."

"To the haunted house?"

"Certainly."

"Why to-night?"

"Well," was the reply "there will be a good deal of talk about the place now in connection with the

disappearance of your brother, and the sooner we get there the better."

Louis Marks shuddered and buried his face in his hands.

"I am afraid that our search will end there," he said. "I tremble when I think what we may find."

The detective could say nothing to console the grief-stricken man, and so he remained silent.

"Do you know," he said, after a time, "that I have an idea that that farmer laid it on pretty strong about that house being haunted?"

"I thought so at the time."

"If his sole idea had been to frighten people away from the place he couldn't have put it stronger."

"Yes, but I fail to see any object in such a course."

"That may appear later on."

"Well," said Louis, "if you are bound to go to the haunted house to-night, I may as well go with you."

"We must slip out unobserved," said the detective. "I don't want any audience bobbing about while I make the search. I presume it will be easy enough to drop out of this window."

He placed the candle on the floor, and raised the sash softly as he spoke.

"It's all quiet on this side of the house," he said, after a short inspection of the place, "and the distance to the ground is not far enough to make us any trouble."

As Nick lowered the window, a man who had been standing against the wall of a building only a few feet away moved hastily off in the direction of the crossroad.

But the detective did not see the figure sneaking off in the darkness, and so went on making his preparations for the trip with a smile on his face.

"If no one knows we are going there," he said, "the chances are that the ghosts and the lights in the windows will not be on exhibition to-night."

The great clock in the hallway below was striking eleven as the two men extinguished their light and dropped softly from their window to the snow-covered ground below.

The detective's dark lantern was alight in an inside pocket, and his revolver was ready for instant use.

A short distance from the house they left the crossroad, and proceeded across the rugged hills in the direction indicated by the man in the barroom.

It was very dark, and the wind blew fiercely against them, so it was slow work, but at last they came to a fence inclosing a field that had evidently once been tilled, but which was now little better than a thicket of tangled bushes.

Here they paused for a moment.

"We have come about the right distance," said Nick, "and the probability is that we are in one of the fields surrounding the haunted house. Do you perceive anything ghost-like?"

By way of answer Louis caught the detective by the arm.

"Look there!" he said, in a trembling voice.

Straight ahead, and only a few rods away, a light flared up in the darkness.

Surrounding the light were the faint outlines of a window frame, and the crossbars of the sash were plainly to be seen.

"That wasn't there a moment ago," said Louis, in a husky voice. "I wonder what it means."

As he spoke the light died out in a blue flame.

"It means that some human agency is at work there," said Nick. "I mean to find out what it is."

At that instant a green light blazed up where the blue had been.

"The fellow, whoever he is," said Nick, "has a poor idea of contrasts. Green should not follow blue in any well-regulated exhibition of fireworks."

The light passed from window to window of a seemingly large room, and then died out.

The detective's companion was trembling like a leaf.

"It's awful," he said, with a shudder; "I can't bear the sight of it. Why not make the search by the light of day?"

Nick did not answer for a moment.

"There is some reason for burning those lights to-night," he said, in a short time. "Do you think any one about the tavern could have suspected us, and gone on ahead?"

"I don't know," replied the other. "I can't think. Let us turn back at once."

"Not if I know myself," was the cool reply. "I did not come out here to investigate ghosts, but I am not going to run away from one, if there is any chance for an introduction."

As the detective finished speaking, a series of low, long-drawn-out groans came from the house.

Louis seized the detective by the arm and held on, as though for protection.

"That probably ends the performance," said Nick, "unless the ghost means fight."

The two men stood there in the darkness for a long time, but no more sounds or flashes of light came from the house.

"Now, then," said the detective, "you remain here, and I'll investigate. I'll go you two to one that the ghost is one of the men who sat there by the tavern fire."

As he spoke, Nick crept away in the darkness, and soon reached the wall of the house.

Here he listened intently for some time, but no sound came from the inside.

The detective's next move was to search for a door or some other means of entering the place.

Just around the corner he found a door

It was closed, but he lifted the old-fashioned latch and stepped quickly back.

The next moment a gust of wind blew the door open with a bang that seemed to jar the house to its foundation.

The sound of footsteps and a smothered oath were heard, and a dark form glided past the detective and disappeared in the darkness.

"The ghost first and the house afterward," thought Nick, following on in the direction taken by the mysterious figure.

In a moment the detective came to the open doorway of a rude cattle shed.

After listening a moment, he stepped inside.

As he did so a figure rose up out of the darkness and struck out fiercely with both hands.

Nick drew his revolver and fired two shots in rapid succession.

For an instant a fleeing figure was dimly outlined against a patch of snow outside, and then Nick's shots were answered from the spot where he had left his companion.

"That ends the ghost for to-night," thought the detective. "He knows now that we are armed and ready for him."

He heard Louis Marks stumbling along in the darkness, and pulled the slide of his dark lantern to guide him.

"Are you hurt?"

Marks asked the question, as he dashed up to the shed almost out of breath.

"No," was the reply. "It seems that we are doing all the shooting to-night."

"We won't see any more of that fellow to-night," said Marks. "He was out there at the edge of the clearing the last time I heard him. He is probably running yet."

"I don't know about that," said Nick. "He came

here to frighten us away, and he may make trouble yet."

Stationing Marks at the open doorway, Nick proceeded to make a close examination of the shed.

It was a small affair, with a rude feed-box running along one end.

Above the feed-box was a small window.

As Nick bent over the box, a cry of warning from his companion caused him to spring back.

"What is it?" he demanded.

Marks pointed toward the window.

"There was a face there a moment ago," he said.

Nick darted outside, and approached the window.

His lantern remained on the inside, and a thin ray of light crept through the opening.

There was no one in sight.

For a moment nothing could be heard but the roar of the wind.

Halfway between the corner and the opening Nick felt himself seized from behind, and the next moment he was fighting for his life.

With that grasp upon his throat it was impossible for him to call out to his companion for assistance.

The strength of his antagonist seemed almost superhuman.

He was forced slowly backward to the earth.

There was a flash of steel before his eyes.

As the blow descended, he summoned all his strength to avoid it, and the effort proved successful.

The blade was broken short off in the frozen earth.

The desperate struggle was renewed, and the unknown man seemed to realize that he was losing ground, for, with a fierce oath, he sprang to his feet and dashed away.

Still weak and dazed, Nick regained his feet and moved off in the direction of the doorway he had just left.

He saw the light moving about on the inside of the shed, and knew that Marks was making a search of the place.

As he reached the open space where the door had been he heard a cry of terror and a heavy fall.

He sprang forward and looked in.

The dark lantern had fallen to the floor, and the light was very dim and uncertain.

His foot came in contact with a body lying on the floor as he moved forward.

The next moment the rays of the lantern fell upon the white face and motionless form of Louis Marks.

One glance at the feed-box by the wall told the story.

The dead face of the missing man stared up into his own.

After weeks of anxious search, Louis Marks had found his brother.

He had fainted at the horrible sight.

Nick was alone with the body and his unconscious companion.

CHAPTER II.

"THIS SIDE UP WITH CARE."

"And so," said the express agent, "they left the boxes and bundles and went away on the morning train."

The station was a small one on the Lehigh Valley road, and the express agent appeared to be half farmer and half station agent.

"And this was early in the morning?"

"Very early. I was not out of bed when they came pounding at my door."

"And the boxes and bundles?"

"They are at the back end of the baggage-room."

"When will they reach New York?"

"That's just what they wanted to know," said the

agent, impatiently. "I told them just as I tell you, that they will be in New York in the morning."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the men?"

"They seemed to be in a great hurry. The team they drove up with had been driven all night, I should judge."

The agent turned back to his office and the two men he had been talking with passed on down the platform.

They appeared to be spruce young men from the city.

The rough teamster of the night before had bloomed out into a good deal of a dandy.

"They are in New York before this," said Nick, dejectedly.

"Yes," said Chick, "and hunting for them there will be looking for a needle in a hay-stack."

"Well," said the detective, "we've looked for men in big cities before now, and caught them, too, so there's nothing to feel blue over. We'll have them yet."

"They are the murderers, all right enough," said Chick, "and there is no doubt that they have been hiding around the haunted house ever since killing poor Marks."

"That's about the size of it," replied Nick. "If you had been with me at the house last night we might have got more of a clew, but the man I had with me fainted when he discovered his brother's body, and I had a hard time getting him away, to say nothing of following the ghost who came near making a ghost of me."

"You think the murderers were both about the place when you were there?"

"I am sure of it, and some one from the tavern notified them."

"You'd have been in a nice box if they had jumped on you when the brother lay there in a swoon."

"Well, they didn't."

"They certainly would have done so had they known how matters stood."

"They were too busy getting away to find out how matters stood."

"The horses must have been right there, and the goods already loaded, or they never could have got here in the time they did."

"They must have had notice that officers were out after them," said Nick, "or they never would have worked the haunted-house racket."

"Well," said Chick, "what shall we do now?"

Nick walked to the rear of the freight house without speaking.

The boxes and bundles referred to by the agent lay there in a pile.

"I suppose we'll have to follow them to New York," said Nick, making an examination of the marking on the boxes.

"There's a lot of the stuff," said Chick.

"Yes," was the reply; "the wagon tracks I followed out showed that the load was a heavy one."

"And it came directly from the haunted house?"

"Yes."

"Rather a bold move."

"A very bold one."

"They must be getting desperate."

Nick stood looking intently at the boxes.

One of them was at least six feet long, and fully three feet wide and deep.

It was made of heavy pine boards, and was well put together.

"Rather expensive sending a box like that by express," observed Chick, lifting one end of it.

Nick did not reply.

He appeared to be in a brown study.

"If I could only be with that box when they unpack it," he said, half aloud.

Chick made several turns up and down the platform, and then came back to where his chief was standing.

"I have an idea," he said, shortly.

Nick looked up with a smile.

"Hang on to it," he said. "You may never have another one."

Chick pointed significantly at the box.

"It is plenty large enough," he said, "and the trip is not a long one."

The detective regarded his assistant with an amused look on his face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Why not take a trip to New York in that box?"

"It is a risky scheme, old man."

"Risky, nothing," was the gay reply. "I've stolen rides in worse places than that."

Nick walked out to where the station agent was sitting behind his little desk.

"How long will that stuff be on the way to New York?" he asked.

The agent looked at his watch.

"It is three o'clock now," he said, "and the stuff will leave here at half-past four."

"And it will be delivered in New York in the morning?"

"Yes."

Nick hastened back to where his assistant was standing by the pile of boxes in the baggage-room.

"Your idea is a good one," he said. "How can you get into the box without the agent suspecting anything?"

Chick pondered a moment.

"You sit out there and talk to the agent for half an hour," he said, at length, "and when you come back here there'll be one more bundle than there is

now. All you'll have to do will be to pound the nails in some way."

"There's no knowing where they may take the box," said Nick. "You may get into a large scrape."

"I'll risk it."

"You'll want something to eat on the way."

"Yes; get me something to take in the box with me and keep the agent away. I'll do the rest."

There was a small bakery just across the street, and in a short time the young man's pockets were well stuffed with such things as were to be had there.

"I'll ride in on the same train," said Nick, "and I will keep as near to the box as possible."

"It would queer the whole act to force yourself into the house, if the box is carried inside," said Chick, "and so you had better stay on the outside and wait for some signal from me."

"You are right there," was the reply. "What we want is to hear the murderers talk about their exploits, and so connect them with the crime. They will do it fast enough if they open the box in private."

"And then what?"

"Be ready with your gun when they knock the cover off, and don't let them escape."

The boxes were addressed to a number near the lower end of Second avenue, and Nick, in order to avoid any mistake, made a note of it.

Then he left Chick to do his part of the work.

The agent smoked and chatted with the detective until nearly train time, never suspecting what was going on at the rear end of the little baggage-room.

"Where's your chum?"

The agent asked the question just as the train whistled.

"Oh, he'll be here in time to get the train," said Nick, handing out the money for two tickets.

The agent stepped into the baggage-room and began pulling at the heavy boxes. While he was tugging at one on the platform Nick drove the nails in the box.

"Want some help?"

Nick seized hold of the large box as he spoke and helped the agent carry it to the edge of the platform.

As he did so, he saw that several holes fully half an inch in diameter had been cut in the edge of the box directly under the cover.

"Chick means to have a breath of fresh air now and then," he thought, as he lifted his end of the box into the car.

Nick had been over that line many times, but it had never seemed so long to him as on this occasion.

It was late in the night, or early in the morning, rather, when he reached New York.

By simply showing his badge, he might have followed the box to the place where it was to remain until morning, but he decided not to do this.

It was more than probable that the men who had shipped the boxes would watch them from the moment they arrived in the city.

They had more than the value of the goods at stake.

If the boxes were traced to them it might mean conviction for murder, therefore they were likely to be on their guard.

It was late in the morning when the boxes were finally loaded on a wagon and started for their final destination.

Nick saw them delivered at the place on Second avenue, and taken into the building at once.

The establishment looked like a second-hand clothing house with a junk-shop annex.

As the detective stood on the opposite side of the

avenue, wondering what would happen next, a telegraph boy darted into the place with a message in his hand.

Nick passed down the avenue a short distance so as to be directly in line with the glass front of the place.

It was easy to see that something unusual had happened.

People were moving about excitedly in the store, and doors were banging as if the excitement had communicated itself to other parts of the house.

In the midst of all the flurry, one old man stood by the lately-arrived goods, pointing down with one trembling hand.

"It is clear that the dispatch has reference to the goods," said Nick, under his breath. "I hope Chick will get out of that nest of robbers all right."

The detective crossed the street, and stood nearer to the store, so that he might hear any sudden outcry.

As he did so the door opened, and two heavily-built men, with villainous faces, stepped out.

It did not require a second look on the part of the detective to inform him that the men had been sent out to watch for spies.

"I'd give a hundred dollars," thought the detective, "to know the contents of that dispatch."

The men parted at the door of the store, one walking each way.

Each man seemed to closely scan every face he met as he passed along the pavement.

In a moment one of them came to the place where Nick was standing, leaning lazily against a railing.

"What are you doing here?"

The tone and manner of the man were more than impudent.

"Just standing here."

Nick was trying hard to keep his temper.

"Well, you move along."

"Do you own this street?"

"No lip, now; move along."

The man who had left the store with the bully now hastened toward the spot.

A small crowd began to collect, and the sympathy all seemed to be with the bully.

Nick was not long in deciding what it all meant.

He seemed to be the only suspicious-looking person in sight, and the people who had received the goods were determined to get him away from the vicinity of the store.

"You won't go, eh?" said the bully, seizing him by the arm. "Here, Bill, lend a hand."

The fight which followed was long remembered in the street.

Nick struck out right and left with all his might, but his antagonists were hard men, and were familiar with scenes like that in which they now were taking so prominent a part.

In the end, the detective, dazed and half blinded, though not seriously injured, was forced into a hack and driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER III.

IN VERY CLOSE QUARTERS.

Chick's position was anything but a pleasant one.

He was not cramped for space, but the air was bad, and the jolting of the cars did not add to his comfort.

He was glad when the box reached New York, for he knew that there would be a little rest before the morning delivery of the goods.

At the express office he amused himself by cutting additional holes in the side of the box, and more than once he laughed outright at hearing the expressmen swearing at the rats, which they believed to be gnawing at the freight.

The box was finally delivered at the place on Second avenue, with many a bump and jam, and he could hear the people talking in the room where he lay.

At first the bundles were moved hastily about, and then he heard a voice ask:

"Everything all right?"

"There seems to be ~~an~~ extra bundle."

"Oh, I guess you didn't count straight."

"Well, it wouldn't be strange if I did make a mistake. We were a trifle pressed for time when we shipped the stuff."

In a moment Chick heard them untying the bundles.

"Get a hatchet," some one said, at length, "and I'll open that big box."

"Now, then," thought the concealed detective, "if Nick Carter isn't somewhere about I'm in a pretty boat."

The moment was an exciting one, but he could only grasp his revolver more firmly and wait.

One heavy blow fell on the box, and then he heard the sound of hurrying feet.

"Hold on!" said a voice; "read this dispatch before you open that big box."

"Where is the dispatch from?"

"From the place this side of where we shipped the goods. I can't recall the name now, and it is not written plainly."

There was a moment's silence, and then a storm of oaths burst from the lips of one of the men in the room.

"You see we were followed."

"Yes, and the men who followed us were pawing over the goods at the station."

"And they made a note of the address on the packages."

"That means that they intended to follow them to New York. What is to be done?"

"The first thing is to see who is sneaking about on the outside. Where are Frank and Bill?"

"Out in front."

"If there's any one hanging around out there they can spot him fast enough. Send them out."

"Suppose they find some one?"

"They must get up a fight and lug him away. We've got to have time to get these goods out of sight."

Chick began to realize that he was in a desperate situation.

If anything happened to Nick now he stood a good chance of being carried out on a shutter.

"Who sent that dispatch?" asked a voice Chick had not heard there before.

"The fellow we sold the team to," was the reply. "We told him to look around a little and let us know if anything suspicious took place there after we left."

"But the dispatch is not from the place where the goods were put on the train."

"No; the fellow had sense enough to go to the next station."

"Does he know how you came by them?"

"He thinks we stole them."

"But the other part? Does he know that?"

"No."

In a short time Chick heard the speakers leaving the room, and he knew by the excited talk in front that something of importance was going on in the street.

"They've got the spy."

"Yes, and he's making a nice fight."

"It would be a queer thing if he should get away with them both."

Chick did not have to guess who the man was

that was having the fight in the street with the friends of the murderers.

It could be no one but Nick Carter.

"They've downed him," shouted a voice, at length.

"Now, what will they do with him?"

"See; they're hustling him into a hack."

"If they've got any sense, they'll dump him in the river."

"No," said a voice, hastily; "we've had enough of that."

The men returned to the room where the box lay. In trying to gain an easier position, Chick bumped one foot hard against the end of the box.

The men stopped talking, and seemed to be listening.

Chick was positive that they had heard the noise he had made.

The people in the room now spoke in whispers.

Chick knew that they were trying to decide what to do with the big box.

His first impulse was to kick off the cover of the box, and have it out there and then.

Then he reasoned that he had nothing to lose and much to gain by delay.

If they opened the box then the fight would be on at once, but if they stowed it away and watched it, he stood a double chance of getting out of the place alive.

One of the men sat down on the box, and began feeling around it in a stealthy way.

Could he be feeling for breathing holes?

The examination was of short duration.

"I think we'd better leave this box as it is," said a voice, in a loud tone, at length.

"Where can we put it?"

"Oh, take it to the basement and stand it up on end."

Chick realized that the words were intended for his ears.

"Blow some chloroform in it first to keep the moths out."

There was a loud laugh at the remark.

"Pile plenty of boxes on top of it, so it won't walk away."

Had any one been in sight through the peephole at the end of the box, the chances are that Chick would have shot him.

"Mighty cute feller, that Jem?"

"You bet."

"We'd a-been in a hole now if he hadn't telegraphed that two fellers were nosin' around the goods, and that only one of them got on the train."

"And as it is——"

"Some one else is in the hole."

Chick did not like the idea of the men talking so much about their affairs when they knew he was listening.

It showed that they did not intend that he should ever leave the place alive.

After a time the men fell to turning the box over and driving nails in the top and ends to strengthen it.

Then the box was half carried and half rolled down a long flight of stairs, shaking Chick up in a terrible manner.

Daylight no longer crept in at the little holes that had been made to admit air.

A damp, musty smell pervaded the place.

The men threw the box on the floor, piled numerous articles, which seemed to be very heavy, about it, and started away.

"I hope the rats won't get in the box," one of them said, with a low chuckle.

"They won't find anything there that's fit to eat, if they do," was the reply.

Left alone in the darkness, Chick at once began

work with the heavy knife which had before served him to such good purpose in making the holes.

In a short time he had one end of the box cut entirely away.

To his great surprise, nothing was there to prevent his creeping out of his cramped quarters.

The heavy articles designed to keep him in had been piled on the cover.

"I hope Nick won't have any worse luck than this," he thought, as he worked his way out and stood on his feet again.

The detective was given very little time in which to congratulate himself.

Footsteps were heard descending the stairs.

The light in the place was very dim, but Chick could see that the evidences of his escape from the box were altogether too prominent.

With a quick movement he pushed a board against the broken end of the box, and then sought a hiding-place.

There seemed to be more than one person approaching, and the rays of a lamp preceded them down the stairs.

Chick sprang to the most distant corner of the basement, lifted the cover from a huge barrel standing there, saw that it was empty, and sprang inside.

He seemed a long time reaching the bottom.

The light, now in the basement, faded out of sight, and the detective knew that he was falling into a cavern beneath the cellar.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO MISSING MEN.

"Oh, what an eye!"

"Where'd you get it, Bill?"

Bill glanced angrily around at his questioners as he entered the place on Second avenue, and threw himself into a chair without speaking.

He was in a decidedly battered condition as to face, and his clothing hung in rags.

"Come, Bill!" said one of the men, pausing for a moment in his work of making up a bundle of goods, "tell us where you found that dandy shiner."

"Horse backed into it," was the gruff reply.

"Where's Frank?"

"He's comin' along in the ambulance."

The goods-packer stopped his work, and sat down on the counter, his face a picture of astonishment.

"You don't mean to say," he said, slowly, "that the chap you took away from here in the hack called the turn on you like that?"

"That's just what he did."

"And you two to one?"

Bill wiped the blood off his face and grunted.

"Where is he now?"

"How do I know?"

"You ought to know."

"Well, things was just whirling when he left, and he didn't leave no card."

"How did he do it? You had him down fine when you left here."

"I don't know. I stopped out here a little ways to get a drink, and when I got back Frank was hanging over a hitching-post.

"Then I says to the chap, 'I'll pay you for that trick, my buck,' and in about two minutes I was hanging over another hitching-post. He's a brute, that feller is."

"Wasn't there any one around to help you?"

"Huh," said Bill, with an oath, "a crowd got around, of course, and stood there and yelled to see one little man get away with two big ones. I was wondering most of the time whether I was going to get out of the scrap alive."

"It didn't take long to do the job, anyway. You

wasn't gone away from the place more than half an hour."

"Where's the old man?"

"Around the place somewhere. He almost had a fit after you left."

"What's that?"

"We found the other spy in that long box."

"The devil you did."

"That's what."

"Where is he now?"

"Still in the box."

"Well," demanded Bill, with an oath, "where's the box? You're a nice lot of fellers to talk to!"

"The box is down in the basement, nailed up tighter than a menagerie in January."

"You'd better go and see if it is. That is a mighty slippery pair of fly cops. They never got their education in the Dutch mountain district of Pennsylvania."

The fellow who had done most of the talking procured a light, and, closely followed by Bill, proceeded down the basement stairs.

"There's the box over there, under all that truck. We thought we'd give him something to lift, if he wanted to crawl out of his neat little sleeping car."

"Let's have him out."

"The old man thought——"

"Hang the old man."

Bill began to throw the boxes off the long packing case.

He paused in a moment, with an exclamation of rage.

"Look here!" he shouted.

He pointed to the broken end of the box as he spoke.

The packer dropped down on his knees, and looked in.

"He's gone, all right enough," he said, in a moment.

"You're a nice lot of duffers," broke in the other.

"Well, we didn't let him pound any one up before he left."

The two men made a careful search of the basement, but the detective was nowhere in sight.

Neither one of the searchers knew of the existence of the sub-cellar under the place.

The old man who did business there had no idea of allowing those who hung around him and aided in his schemes now and then to know all the secrets of the place.

"The old man will have a fit when he finds this out."

"Let him find it out himself, then," growled Bill.

"But it won't do for Harris and Charley to hang around here now."

"Tell them, then."

The other mused a moment.

"I guess you're right," he said; "the goods came here in the regular way of business, and they can't touch the old man. I wonder where Harris and Charley are?"

"You'd better find them mighty quick," said Bill, "and tell them to light out. The officers will be back here, and it's the murderers they want, and not the goods."

When the two men reached the head of the stairs they found the "old man," as they called him, behind the counter waiting on a new customer.

The customer appeared to be a very old man.

He was so crooked that his back and shoulders went far toward forming a half circle, and he was possessed of a long, gray beard, and a decidedly Jewish cast of features.

He drove sharp bargains and paid for each article

as he bought it, taking the money from a very large roll of bills.

It is needless to say that the "old man" was doing his best to reduce the size of the roll.

At length the customer asked to be shown something that the merchant could not find in the store, and he lit a lamp and started for the basement to make a search for it there.

The customer, chatting amiably all the time, followed on behind.

The old man was evidently annoyed at the occurrence, but he could not think of offending so good a customer by telling him that he was not wanted in the basement.

A moment later he was sorry he had not done so, for the ancient customer poked around in the basement in the most exasperating manner.

Not a box, bundle or barrel escaped his scrutiny.

The little bell at the street door rang.

"I haven't got what you want," said the old man, nervously, "and there's some one in the store, so we'll have to go up."

"There's lots of things here that I want," said the customer. "You go up and return. I will remain here."

The old man left reluctantly, consoling himself with the thought that he could send some one from the store down in a moment.

But there was only the customer in the store when he reached the top of the stairs.

Bill and his companion had gone off to notify the two murderers of their peril.

The new customer was a long-winded fellow, and once or twice while he was examining goods the old man stepped to the head of the stairs and looked down.

Finally the customer went away, passing Bill in the doorway.

The bully's face was flushed, and it was easy to see that he was laboring under strong excitement.

"Who has been in here during the last ten minutes?" he demanded.

"No one but the customer you just met and the customer you left here when you went out."

"Where is the customer I left here?"

"In the basement, looking at goods."

"You fool."

"What's wrong?" asked the old man, wringing his hands.

"Wrong," repeated the bully, with a perfect volley of oaths, "the boys say that Nick Carter is at work on that Pennsylvania murder case, and I'll bet a gallon of whisky, and hold the stakes that he is down in the basement now."

"It can't be possible," muttered the old man, in an agony of fear.

Bill walked to the head of the stairs and looked down.

The lamp was burning brightly, and by its light he saw the old customer sitting on the edge of a barrel at the rear end of the long basement.

At that instant the door opened, and Frank walked in.

The two men held a short, whispered conversation.

"What are you going to do?" demanded the old man, as the two men pushed heavy billies up their sleeves and started down the stairs.

"Put that sneak to sleep."

The man sitting on the barrel saw the two bullies approaching.

His back and shoulders represented a half circle no longer.

While the old man stood at the head of the stairs muttering, they sprang upon the transformed customer.

One of them went down under a vigorous blow, but he caught the detective by the foot, and he, too, went down.

Frank stood over the prostrate man with an up-lifted billy.

As he was about to strike, a form sprang from the huge barrel in the corner and felled him to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

A BIT OF HARD LUCK.

"Well, of all the blooming idiots——"

Nick Carter leaned back in his chair and laughed until his sides ached.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," grumbled Chick.

"You get disgusted too easily, my boy," replied the detective. "We are sure to come out at the top of the heap yet."

Nick Carter and his assistant were sitting in their room in the one hotel of a small village a hundred miles west of Milwaukee.

They had turned peddlers, and their wagon, well loaded with crockery and tinware, stood in the yard just below their window.

Nick looked like a man who had sold plates and sugar bowls to farmers and their wives all his life, and Chick appeared to be a merry youngster who was just learning the business.

"I don't believe those two murderers are within a million miles of this place," growled Chick.

"Well, we got near enough to them at one time," was the laughing reply. "We would have captured them at that place on Second avenue, too, if that fool farmer hadn't sent that dispatch."

"Yes, but he did send it, and it got us both into a nice scrape, too. I thought I had a through ticket for the infernal regions when I fell through that bottomless barrel in the basement."

Nick laughed heartily at the recollection.

"It proved to be a mighty lucky fall, though," he said, at length. "You popped up out of the barrel just in time to save me from getting a broken head."

"It did come out about right," admitted the young assistant, "but, after all, Bill and Frank got word to the two murderers so that they were nowhere to be found when we got ready to pay them a little attention."

"Well, we've got them where they won't be apt to warn any more of our men for a year or two at least."

"Yes," growled Chick, "and they've got us off here a thousand or more miles from nowhere, hunting two Jew peddlers who have probably escaped to some other planet."

"Oh, they're out here somewhere," said Nick. "We'll strike their trail when we least expect it."

Chick did not partake of this hopeful view of the case. He was in a kicking mood, and he was bound to make the most of it.

"I don't see what we're doing with the old case anyway," he said. "Here you've got cases waiting for you in half the big cities of the country, and you put in your time chasing a couple of peddlers over the continent."

Instead of being angry Nick appeared amused at the mood his assistant was in.

"You ought to know by this time," he said, "that I never give up a case. I'll be after these men when the last trumpet sounds if I don't catch them before that time."

As Nick spoke he stepped to the window and looked out.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "we seem to have a rival in business. I wonder what he's selling?"

A short distance down the street a peddler's rig was standing in front of a store.

"That's the sort of rig we're looking for," said Nick, putting on his hat.

Chick made a movement to follow him to the door.

"You sit out in front and watch," said Nick. "If I want you I'll signal."

When Nick reached the place of business in front of which the rig stood he saw the sign of an express company over the door.

Inside he found a green-looking fellow receipting for goods in a clumsy way.

"Hello," he said, in the free-and-easy way of the West; "I'm in the peddling business myself. Wagon over here at the hotel. What you selling?"

The young fellow looked at his questioner for a moment with a stupid stare, loaded his arms with bundles, and walked out to the wagon without making any reply.

"Anything for me here?"

Nick took the book in his hand as he spoke and glanced quickly down the column.

The goods the young fellow had receipted for were from New York, and were simply addressed to "Stahl & Co."

The detective saw that it would take the fellow some time to place all the goods in his wagon, so he hurried back to Chick.

"I think we've got 'em," he said, as the two men walked slowly down the street.

"We've had 'em half-a-dozen times before during the trip," said Chick, with a smile.

"Well," said Nick, "that fellow is receipting for goods from New York, and he isn't familiar with the name he is signing."

"How do you know that?"

"By the way he writes it."

"Peddlers are usually ignorant."

"That's all right, but they usually know enough to

sign their own names without blundering. Besides, this chap has been sent in to get these goods and told not to talk. He wouldn't even answer a civil question."

"Perhaps you are right."

"It's a sure thing that the men who murdered poor Jake Marks are in this part of the country somewhere, and it's dollars to apples that they are the owners of that rig."

"They seem mighty shy about going to an express office."

"Of course. They know that we are hot on their track."

"What is to be done now?"

"We must follow that rig."

"I suppose so."

"What is the reverse of that rig you have on?"

"Plowboy. And yours?"

"Tramp. We'd better make up in the woods, after the wagon gets a short distance from town."

The two detectives lounged and smoked in front of the hotel until the wagon they were watching started away from the express office.

The driver glanced nervously around as he took his seat on the rig, but no one seemed to be paying any attention to him or his wagon, and so he started off at a brisk trot.

"He'll soon distance us at that pace," said Nick. "Put a saddle on the horse and keep as near to him as possible without attracting attention."

"And you?"

"Oh, you'll see a tramp out there somewhere about the time he is wanted."

"He's going pretty fast."

"Well, he'll slack up after he gets out of the village. When you get him on a long stretch of road you may ride back and confer with me, if you choose."

A slight elevation in the road now concealed the wagon from view, and Chick was soon riding briskly along after it.

Half an hour later a plowboy on horseback and a tramp on foot met where the road ran through a little wooded valley about a mile from the village.

Nick smiled at the decidedly rural appearance of his assistant.

"Anything new?" he asked.

"The fellow seems to be waiting for some one. He is driving very slowly and keeping a sharp lookout on both sides of the road as he goes along."

"What's the country beyond?"

"Woods on both sides of the road."

"Then they're waiting for him not far away. Keep as close to him as you can, and ride back if he leaves the road or any one joins him."

In ten minutes Nick Carter, plodding slowly along the dusty road, heard the quick beat of a horse's hoofs in the road just ahead.

He had no doubt that it was Chick, returning with information of some sort, but he concealed himself in the thicket at the side of the road in order that he might observe the rider unobserved.

In a moment the horse came into full view.

It was the animal Chick had been riding, but the saddle was now empty.

The detective made no effort to stop the frightened horse.

Instead he forced his way rapidly through the thicket until he came to a slight eminence which commanded a view of the country beyond for some distance.

Not far away a large barn stood at the edge of a field, with a fringe of trees between it and the road.

Just turning the corner of the barn, so as to be out of sight from the road, was the peddler's wagon.

Nick crept as near to the place as he dared, and

lay down and waited for some sign of life about the barn.

He had not long to wait.

Two men appeared at an opening on the second floor of the structure, and peered cautiously about.

Nick gave an excited start, and crept closer to the earth.

He had never seen the two faces before, but there was no doubt that they were the faces of the two murderers he sought.

Directly the young man who had receipted for the goods left the barn and walked slowly toward the road.

He glanced cautiously to the right and left as he reached the road, and, seeing no one in sight, walked away.

"That probably takes him out of the case," thought Nick. "I wonder what has become of Chick?"

The two men at the barn kept out of sight, but Nick knew by the low murmur of voices on the other side of the barn that they were busying themselves about the wagon.

It was a risky thing to do, but there was no other way, so the detective left his hiding-place and walked boldly toward the barn.

If they saw him perhaps they would think nothing of a tramp seeking a barn for an afternoon sleep.

If they did not see him so much the better.

He reached the place seemingly unobserved, and crept into an empty stall.

He noticed as he entered the place that the mows above the stalls on both sides of the barn were still piled high with hay, although it was late in the season.

On one side the hay hung threateningly over the main floor.

"That will fall some day," he thought, "and make a nice mess for the farmer to clean up."

Outside the men were rearranging the goods in the wagon, and talking as they worked, but the detective could not distinguish a word they said.

He was becoming anxious about Chick.

Surely there would be some evidence of excitement about the men if they had discovered the young man and either killed or wounded him.

And then the farmer boy?

Unused as he undoubtedly was to scenes of violence, he would never have gone away so unconcernedly after witnessing such a fight as Chick was capable of making.

Once or twice Nick thought he heard a movement in the hay above his head, but he attributed it to the wind blowing through the crevices in the walls, and paid no attention to it.

"The men are probably armed," Nick thought, as he heard them leave the wagon and move toward the wide door by which he had entered, "but if I get the drop I guess I can take them in."

There was no place of concealment on the floor of the barn, and the men were certain to see him as soon as they came to the front of the stall, so the only thing to do was to act promptly.

"When I get the irons on them," Nick thought, "they'll tell me all about Chick's sudden disappearance, if they know anything about it."

The next moment the two men stood opposite the entrance to the stall, looking in on the seeming tramp.

Before they could draw a weapon he advanced upon them with a revolver in each hand.

"Throw up your hands," Nick said, coolly. "You are both under arrest."

"What does this mean?" demanded one of the men.

"It means that I have warrants in my possession for your arrest on a charge of murder."

Nick did not notice a peculiar, sliding sound from above.

Without warning the whole tottering mass of hay above thundered to the floor, burying the detective beneath its tremendous weight.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS BURGLARY.

"Who is that lady?"

"Peddler. Why?"

"She's the handsomest woman I ever saw."

The rosy-cheeked dealer in peddlers' supplies chuckled as he bent closer over his books in his extensive store in Montreal.

"A good many people think the same thing," he said, glancing up at a trim, girlish figure bending over a counter a short distance away.

"How do you know that?"

"She sells lots of goods."

"Any lady with a face like that could sell goods. How long has she been in the business here in Montreal?"

"Don't know. She's been coming here after supplies only about a week."

"What does she sell?"

"Laces, embroidery—anything she can carry in that cute little bag you see in her hand."

"Well, she's a beauty."

The dealer chuckled again.

"Case of love at first sight," he said.

After transacting his business with the merchant the customer stepped to the counter where the girl was busy comparing and selecting goods.

"There, how do you think these will do?"

The girl stepped to his side and spoke without taking her eyes off the goods in her hand.

Before Harris Blank, the customer, could reply she glanced innocently up at his face and turned away with a pretty blush.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I thought I was speaking to the proprietor."

"I am not the proprietor," said Blank, with a smile, "but I may be able to help you, for all that. You see, I am in the peddling business myself."

"I'm afraid I'm a little green at it," said the girl. "Was it easy for you to select your stock when you first began?"

"You'll get over that when you know your customers better. I had no trouble."

"Where are your customers?"

"Oh, everywhere—sometimes I sell here in Canada and sometimes in the States."

"I should like to sell in the States. Please tell me where I may find good territory."

"Well," said Blank, "Pennsylvania is a good State, and so is, well, Michigan and—and Wisconsin."

"You have been there?"

Blank hesitated.

"Yes, a little—a very little."

The girl went on selecting goods, and Blank stood there and watched her.

"Are you selling in the city?" he asked, in a moment.

"Yes, in the city, and, do you know, I think it is just horrid? I can't even find a good hotel in the whole city of Montreal."

"Why," said Blank, "I have a splendid place over on St. Maurice street. I am sure you would be suited there."

The girl shook her head.

"I have tried several places already," she said.

Blank wrote the number of the house on a card and handed it to the girl.

"When you get ready for a change you might try it," he said.

The girl thanked him, put the card in her pocket, and walked away, followed by his admiring glances.

Just then the street door opened. The man who entered stepped up to Blank and the two went out together.

"Making a mash?"

The newcomer asked the question as soon as the two men were in the street.

Blank looked up with a grin, but said nothing.

"What was on that paper?"

The question was asked in no gentle tone of voice.

"What paper?"

"What paper, you fool? The paper you handed that girl just as I stepped up to the door."

"Look here, Charley Rozencrans," said Blank, with a frown; "I don't think that's any of your business."

"It is my business," said the other, hotly. "Were you giving her your address?"

Blank remained silent.

"Tell me."

"No."

Blank thought it better to tell a lie than to have a quarrel with his partner.

"Did you find the Milwaukee papers you were in search of?"

Blank asked the question after the two had walked some distance without speaking.

"Yes. I found the papers."

"Well?"

"Well, there's a reward offered for information regarding a young man who recently disappeared about a hundred miles west of the city of Milwaukee."

"So they haven't found him?"

"It seems not."

"Which one do you think the advertisement is for?"

"Why, the one we put to sleep."

"Under the hay?"

"No, the other."

"Then they haven't found Nick Carter yet?"

"They either haven't found him or he got out in some way and made a sneak without saying anything about his trying to arrest us and making a failure of it."

"Well, he got out."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, that hay that Ike tumbled down on him must have been cleaned up before this, and if a dead man had been found under it the papers would have been full of it before now. Besides, Ike would be in trouble over it, for he couldn't help showing that he knew something about it."

"I guess you are right," said Rozencrans.

"Of course I am right."

"And that means that Nick Carter is still after us."

"Of course."

"He never gives up a case."

Blank made no reply.

"There's only one thing to do if he comes here," said Rozencrans, looking his companion keenly in the face.

"What's that?"

"We must finish what we began at the barn in Wisconsin. It will be no fault of ours if he ever leaves Canada alive."

"I don't like it."

"This is no time to weaken."

"We agreed in Pennsylvania that that should be the last."

"And broke the agreement in Wisconsin."

"Chick may not be dead," said Blank, with a shudder.

"All the worse luck for us if he isn't."

"I hope he isn't."

Rozencrans' reply was a volley of oaths.

"As long as Nick Carter and his assistant are alive," he said, when he grew cooler, "we will be kept on the run."

"How can they follow us here?"

"How did they follow us to Wisconsin?"

"By the goods we had shipped from New York. We have had none shipped here."

"You forget the Montreal letters we lost at the barn."

Blank pondered a moment.

"You may be right," he said. "If Nick Carter got out alive, and the letters were anywhere about the barn he found them. He overlooks nothing."

"That's why I was so anxious to know what you gave that girl. She may be a spy for all I know."

"That beautiful creature a spy? Impossible."

"She is just the sort of a woman Nick Carter would be likely to select to do his sneak work."

Blank turned pale at the very thought.

He was just on the point of telling his partner the truth, but he refrained.

"If we are going to have a row about it," he thought, "we must not have it here on the street."

The two murderers reached their boarding-house on Maurice street feeling very blue.

They were met at the door by the landlord.

"I want to ask a favor of you, gentlemen," he said.

The peddlers looked up, inquiringly.

"It's just this way," continued the landlord; "the wife and children of one of my boarders arrived here to-day, and I want to use your room for just one night."

Blank looked relieved.

"Go to any hotel you like," said the landlord, "and I'll pay the bill."

"That'll be all right," said Blank, hastily.

Rozencrans was about to remonstrate, but his partner motioned to him to remain silent.

"It may be safer to change our quarters for a night or two," he said, as the landlord re-entered the house.

His partner regarded him a moment with a look of surprise on his face.

"You are acting strangely," he said. "I believe now that you gave that girl our address."

"Believe what you like," was the sullen reply. "Let's eat our supper and get out of here. I'm tired."

But the two peddlers did not rest easily in their room at the hotel they put up at.

"There's a lot of papers and things in my valise at the boarding-house," said Blank, at length, "that we don't want strangers to see. I have a great mind to go back there and get it."

"This is a nice time of night to get folks up," growled Rozencrans.

"Can't help it. I'm going."

"Then I'm going, too."

The two men were soon on the way to the house.

As they were passing the Bank of Montreal, Blank suddenly clutched his companion by the arm.

"We are being watched!" he exclaimed. "Don't look around; there is a fellow hiding behind one of the pillars of the bank. I believe he is piping us. Let's get out of this."

They hurried on, and soon came in sight of the house they sought.

Lights were flaring from all the windows, and a little crowd had collected in front of the door.

As they looked an officer in uniform left the street and passed into the house.

At that moment one of the boarders came hurrying along the street.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he came up to where the two men were standing; "you're in luck to-night."

"What's up?" demanded Blank.

"Burglars."

"Where?"

"In your room."

The darkness alone prevented the agitation of the two men from being observed.

"You see," explained the boarder, "I went there to sleep to-night, and a little while ago I heard a noise at the door."

"Go on."

"I thought nothing of it, and finally went to sleep. The next I knew the rays of a dark lantern were flashed in my face."

"For Heaven's sake, tell us what happened."

"Well, the burglar looked at me a moment, saw that I was ready for him, and slid out of the door. Then I alarmed the house."

"How did he get in?"

"Walked right through the hall."

"Did he get anything?"

"I don't know. You'd better go up and look over your stuff."

The boarder passed on, and the two men stood looking blankly into each other's faces.

"Of course you know what that burglar wanted?" said Rozencrans.

"Yes; it was Nick Carter, or one of his men, and he wanted us."

"Look! There's some one watching us again."

Blank gave one glance in the direction indicated, and dashed away in the darkness, listening only to the sound of pursuing footsteps.

CHAPTER VII.

ONLY A LITTLE JOKE.

"Wot you fellers drivin' at?"

"Hush!"

"Yes; talk lower. Some one may be listening."

"Let 'em listen."

"It ain't safe."

"If dey don't hear more'n I do dey won't hear much, tell you dat right here, cully."

The two peddlers were seated at a little table in a cheap restaurant.

Between them was a tough-looking specimen of the saloon rowdy class.

He had evidently attempted to improve his appearance by a liberal use of soap and water.

His hair lay remarkably slick on a villainously-shaped head, and his shabby clothing had been carefully brushed, but the rowdy and the tough showed through all efforts at concealment.

"You don't look very prosperous."

Rozencrans glanced critically at the fellow's attire as he spoke, and ended by nudging him in the ribs.

"Naw," was the reply. "Dis ain't no country fer a gentleman to git a decent livin' in."

"Would you like to make a roll?"

"Would I? Would I like something besides air for a steady feed? Well, I should say so!"

Before speaking, Rozencrans bent closer to the fellow, and looked around the small room, as though fearful of being overheard.

The waiter had gone to the kitchen, and there was no one else in the place.

"Well," he said, slowly and significantly, "there's a New York copper in the city who's getting too gay."

The tough gave an uneasy start.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"We think it's Nick Carter or one of his men."

The fellow's face fairly turned pale.

"Who's he after?"

"All of us, for all we know."

"I dunno what dey want me in New York for."

Rozencrans laughed.

"Oh, come off, Dan Lynch," he said. "We know all about that man being robbed and murdered in Central Park."

Lynch dropped his knife and fork, and sprang to his feet with an oath on his lips.

"This ain't no place to talk about private matters," he said. "You fellers'll git a push in de face de first t'ing you know. I ain't no dead-soft mark. See?"

"If we get a push in the face," said Rozencrans, coolly, "you'll get a push toward New York."

"Well, you sing low, den. Wot do you want, anyway?"

"We want you to help get rid of the man we spoke of."

"You just git him in reach of dat, an' I'll put him to sleep mighty quick."

Lynch slipped a heavy billy down his sleeve as he spoke.

"Now you begin to talk sense."

"Wot about de roll?"

"I guess you want him out of the way just as badly as we do," said Rozencrans.

"No, you don't," said Lynch. "You didn't hunt me up to put me on. He's after you, an' you want de help of an expert at putting such fellers to sleep. How much do I git?"

"A hundred."

"I'd git dat fer killin' a cat in New York."

"But you are interested."

With an exclamation of disgust, Lynch arose from his chair and made for the door.

"When you fellers git ready to talk business," he said, as he passed out, "you can look me up ag'in."

The two peddlers followed him out, and saw him stop at a saloon a short distance down the street.

"We must follow him," said Rozencrans; "we can't afford to let him go away like that."

Blank held back.

"I'm for dropping the whole thing and getting out of town," he said.

"You're a fool," was the reply. "We'll be followed wherever we go, and it may as well be settled right here."

"Well, go and call him out."

Rozencrans entered the saloon, and soon returned with Lynch, who looked anything but annoyed at having been followed.

"We've been chased about the country until we haven't got much money," said Rozencrans, "and that's the reason we put the price so low just now."

"I'm broke," growled Lynch, "an' if you'll make it two hundred you can run him up ag'in me."

"I think we can do that."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Where?"

"Anywhere you say."

"When do I git de stuff?"

"We can fix that to-night, too."

"I want some now."

Rozencrans handed him ten dollars.

"And now," he said, "where shall we bring him?"

"How you goin' to bring him anywhere?"

"It's just this way," said the other; "he has a woman spy here in the city, and my friend here is mashed on her."

Blank turned angrily toward his companion, and flushed deeply.

"Oh, you needn't look so black about it!" said Rozencrans, "it's the truth and you know it."

"You'd better write a note to this woman and tell her Blank is in some trouble and wants to see her."

"She won't go."

"Of course she won't. She'll send Nick Carter—if it is Nick that is following us."

"I hope it is," growled Lynch.

"Got it in for him?"

"You bet."

"Well, where shall we send him?"

"I won't do nothin' to him. Oh, no!"

Rozencrans looked pleased.

"I'm glad you like your job," he said.

"If I git just one swipe at him dare won't be no more Nick Carter. You hear me?"

"Where shall we send him?"

"He won't git away from me ag'in. I'll cut him up in inch pieces. His nerve won't count when I kiss him once wid dis billy."

"Are you going crazy?" demanded the peddler.

"I'll just set him sailin' round de moon. He'll know mighty soon if dere's any saloons on Mars."

"Come, talk sense!"

Lynch's eyes glared wildly, and his huge hands opened and closed convulsively.

"He's had a set-to with Nick Carter some time," thought the peddler, "and got the worst of it."

"Well," said Lynch, in a moment, "there's a saloon and boarding-house down here where dey don't ask any questions, an' you might git him in dare."

He scribbled out the name of a street and a number on a card as he spoke, and handed it to one of the peddlers.

"How'll you fix him?"

"I don't know yet. You git him there, an' I'll do de rest. Are you on?"

"We'll say in the note that he must call at nine o'clock. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Don't get full, now, and make a muff of it."

"I'll be all right."

The three worthies now parted, and the peddlers proceeded to hunt up a new boarding-house.

Their baggage was still at the old place, but they dare not go back there after it.

They were getting very anxious.

There were many articles in their trunks which would, without doubt, fasten upon them the murder of poor Jacob Marks.

Their only hope of safety seemed to lie in the killing of the man who was following them so persistently.

"Say, Charley," said Blank, as they walked along, "what do you think has become of Chick?"

"I guess that blow killed him."

Blank sighed.

"He wasn't dead when I saw him last," continued Charley; "but he was bleeding to death mighty fast. I think the horse's feet must have struck him when he fell off."

"Where did that country boy who went to town for us go to so fast? He just sneaked off, and never came back for his pay."

"I can't imagine. He couldn't have got into that hole and found Chick, could he?"

"Hardly."

The peddlers wrote the note, and sent it to the office of the merchant to be delivered to the girl, and then waited impatiently for the day to close.

They had every confidence in the ability of the tough to finish the detective.

They had known him well in New York, and knew him to be a nervy as well as a desperate villain.

In the meantime the man of whom they were ex-

pecting so much was sitting in the saloon he had given them the address of, filling up with poor whisky.

"I've got a little joke to play on a feller here to-night," he explained to the proprietor, "an' I want dat room upstairs."

"Do you mean the one with the private stairway?"

"Course."

"Well, you can't have it. I ain't going to have any of your little jokes played in my house."

The two men conferred together in whispers for some time, and then the landlord seemed to consent to the tough's proposition.

"You do that to Nick Carter," he said, "and the boys will buy you all the diamonds you can carry."

This conversation took place just before dark.

As they sat there together in the barroom a young girl, with an exceedingly dirty face and a mass of uncombed hair, came dancing in.

"Fill de growler," she said, putting a pail on the bar.

"You'd better saw off," said the landlord, filling the pail. "You said you didn't drink."

The girl made a wry face, and darted out.

"Where'd you get her?" asked Lynch.

"Wife hired her this afternoon. Have to let her go, I guess."

At half-past eight Lynch entered the room he had engaged.

Placing the light on a stand, he proceeded to make a close examination of the floor in the center of the room.

He finally found the place he sought, and, pressing on it with his foot, a large section of the floor fell back, showing that it was hung on hinges.

Leading from the room was a long, dark slide, from the bottom of which came the sound of running water.

"When Nick Carter gets a bump on de head an' falls down dare," he thought, "dare won't be no more Nick Carter."

He drew the floor up in its place again, and sat down to wait.

As he did so, a light step passed along the hallway outside and paused at his door.

He shouted "Come in!" in answer to a low knock, and, stepping behind the door, raised his billy high in the air.

The blow descended as a man turned the knob and stepped into the place, but the billy shot aimlessly through the air.

The newcomer, evidently prepared for the blow, had dodged away.

Before Lynch could recover himself he received a blow on the temple which fairly lifted him from his feet.

He fell on the trapdoor at the exact place where his foot had sought the spring a few moments before.

The spring yielded, and he realized that he was falling into the trap prepared for the detective.

Before he could reach out a hand to save himself, or utter a cry, the foul waters of the mighty trunk sewer below closed over him.

A look of horror came to the face of the detective as he realized what had happened.

He was in no position, however, to waste time in idle regrets.

He knew, then, that his own death had been

planned, and knew that the accomplices of the tough might enter the room at any moment.

After some delay, he discovered the means by which the trapdoor was restored to its former place.

This accomplished, he sat down to wait, and to map out some plan of action.

For once in his life Nick Carter was sorely puzzled.

While he waited he heard the sound of hurrying feet below.

The next moment a piercing scream was heard.

He sprang to his feet, and opened the door.

There was no doubt now as to what was going on downstairs.

The voice he heard was the voice of his girl assistant, Nell, who had given him the note she had received, and warned him to beware of a trap.

He knew she was in the house, but he could not understand how she could be in trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOSING GAME.

The two peddlers were too anxious, to remain in their new boarding-house very long.

They walked about the streets until nearly nine o'clock, and then sought the vicinity of the place named in the decoy letter, which was intended to lure Nick Carter to his death.

They stood in a dark stairway, not far away, until after nine o'clock, and then Rozencrans, thoroughly disguised, as he thought, in false chin whiskers and wig, ventured into the barroom.

He was not acquainted in the place, and Lynch was nowhere in sight.

As he sat there waiting, with a glass of beer on the table before him, a shabbily-dressed girl stepped into the room.

He knew that he had seen her before, but he could not tell where.

He watched her closely for a moment, and then his heart almost stopped beating with fear as he remembered where he had seen that face before.

In spite of the red hair, and the freckles, with which her face was covered, he recognized her as the girl he had seen Blank talking with at the supply merchant's place of business.

She was the girl who had caused them to be followed to their old boarding-house.

What was she doing there?

She seemed waiting about the barroom for something.

The proprietor was busy waiting on customers, and did not seem to notice her.

He thought, too, that the proprietor seemed nervous and uneasy.

During a lull in the business, he stepped up to the bar.

"Do you know whether Dan Lynch has been in here to-night?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Don't know him."

Rozencrans then remembered that Lynch was going under an assumed name in Montreal.

What that name was he did not know.

"Well," said the peddler, "he was to meet some one here to-night—upstairs."

The landlord started, and an ugly look came into his face.

"What do you know about it?" he demanded.

"He is working for me."

The landlord started away.

"I don't know anything about it," he said.

"Stop," said the peddler. "Is the man who engaged that room, up there now?"

The landlord scowled and did not answer.

"It is important," continued the peddler, "because there is a spy in the house."

The landlord beckoned him into a back room.

"Yes," he said, when they were alone, "he is up there now, and a stranger went up to see him just a few minutes ago. Now, what is it about this spy?"

"I believe that girl out there to be one of Nick Carter's assistants. How long has she been here?"

"Came this afternoon."

"Well, she's disguised. Get close to her, and snatch off that wig. Then we can see what she looks like."

The landlord arose with an oath, and started for the front room.

"I'll do it," he said, "and if she is a spy, I'll——"

He did not finish the sentence.

As he stepped into the front room, two men entered from the street.

One was Blank, looking more anxious than ever, and one was evidently a young tough.

His clothes were dirty and ragged, and he walked with the swagger affected by certain youths on the Bowery.

They both ordered beer, and the young tough remained standing by the bar.

The girl stood at the end of the bar cleaning some bright work.

The landlord motioned her to step into the back room, and followed her in.

The next moment a scream was heard, and the girl came running out, closely followed by the landlord, who carried a huge wig of red hair in his hand.

One glance at the girl's head was enough to show where he had obtained it.

The girl started for the stairway leading to the rooms above, but the landlord caught her roughly by the arm, and held her back.

"Tell me what this means?" he demanded.

"Let de kid alone, you!"

The speaker was the young tough.

The enraged man paid no attention to the remark.

"You spy!" he hissed at the girl, "I'll teach you to come the sneak act in my house!"

As he spoke, he raised his hand to strike the girl.

The young man caught his arm.

"If you do that," he said, "I'll punch your head."

Without saying a word, the landlord struck out with his right, barely missing the young man's face.

Then he released his hold on the girl, and made for the young man who had interfered.

The girl did not leave the room, but remained standing at the foot of the stairs.

As the young man threw up his guard to defend himself, Rozencrans laid his hand heavily on Blank's shoulder, and pointed at his face.

"We have been wondering," he whispered, "whether Chick got out of that place alive. Look

at that fellow's face, and tell me what you think about it, now."

The landlord reached for the seeming tough's collar, as if to fire him out of the place, but he received a heavy blow under the ear and fell to the floor.

The young man turned toward the stairs, but, with a cry to each other not to let him go there, and not to let him escape, both peddlers sprang upon him.

One of them went down under a blow, which carried all the strength of the young man's arm and all the weight of his body, and lay upon the floor, apparently unconscious.

Again the young man turned toward the stairs, but Rozencrans and the landlord were upon him.

They closed with him, and threw him to the floor.

The landlord stood over him with the ice-shaver in his hand, ready to strike, when the girl sprang forward with a scream which rang through the house.

There came from the stairway the sound of hurrying feet, and the landlord looked relieved.

He fully expected to see Lynch rushing down to his assistance.

But the man who sprang into the room was Nick Carter.

Paying no attention to the landlord, Nick sprang upon Rozencranz, forced him to the floor, and proceeded to handcuff him.

While performing the same service for Blank, he heard the voice of Nell again, this time hard and cool.

"If you move a muscle," the voice said, "I'll shoot."

The two peddlers were now secure, and Nick turned about.

"I guess you hadn't better move, landlord," he said, calmly. "I rather think the girl will shoot."

"I have been attacked in my own house," he grumbled, slinking behind the bar. "I'd like to know what it all means."

"It means," replied Nick, "that these men are under arrest for the murder of a fellow-peddler in Pennsylvania, and it means that you will find Dan Lynch down in the sewer, where you expected to have me long before this. Call in some officers, Nell, while I shake hands with the long-lost Chick."

It may well be imagined that the greeting between the two detectives was a warm one, for they had not met before since that day in Wisconsin.

A couple of Canadian officers were soon in the place, and the two murderers were sent away to police headquarters.

After a chase of thousands of miles, the murderers of poor Jacob Marks were at last in custody.

"And now, young man," said Nick, with a smile, as the two detectives and the girl sat in the hotel parlor, "you may as well explain why you quit me in Wisconsin, and how you got here."

"I didn't report in Wisconsin," said Chick, with a grin, "because one of the peddlers knocked me off the horse, and left me for dead in a hole in the ground."

"But why didn't you let us hear from you when you got out? I got out from under a haystack that fell down on me, by way of a hole in the floor, and went off thinking, of course, that you would turn up somewhere."

"I heard about that haystack falling down on

you," laughed Chick, "and it is a good thing you didn't try to get out in the usual way, for they waited around there some time to shoot you, if you should stick your nose out. And, by the way, it didn't fall down. It was pushed down by a country lout they had hired, and who is still scared half to death over the affair."

"But why didn't you let me hear from you?"

"Well, I wasn't in any shape to write, being unconscious from that bang on the head. You see, the young man who receipted for the goods was the chap who found me, and he took me home and did not dare say a word, because he had been helping the murderers get their goods and hide them, and he was afraid he would be arrested. They used me so well that when I got better I slid out without saying anything about it. I suppose those Wisconsin officers are looking for me yet."

"I should have been out there myself in about twenty-four hours," said Nick. "I thought sure you had been badly injured. Why didn't you telegraph before you came here?"

"Because I wanted to see this case through, and I was afraid you wouldn't let me come, Nell being here."

"But how in the Old Scratch did you find your way to that den of thieves?"

Chick laughed.

"Well," he said, "I began to look up the peddler supply stores yesterday, and found Nell. She didn't know it, but I followed her here."

"It's a good thing you did," said Nick. "Otherwise we might not have captured those men to-day."

"Now, tell me," said Chick, "how you tracked them to Montreal?"

"Oh, they lost some letters out of their pockets at the barn, and I found them. They put me on the right track."

"I was in hopes of finding the murderers before I found you," said Chick; "but I never have any luck that way."

"They're a desperate pair," replied Nick, "and I don't know as we ever should have found them if Blank hadn't got mashed on Nell."

The girl blushed and went smiling out of the room.

"I thought I had them last night," continued Nick, "but I got into a room they had just got out of, and succeeded in scaring the whole house into fits. I got out of there quick, I tell you. Then I struck the fellows out on the street, but they got away in the darkness."

"You're a lucky man," said Chick, after he had been told all about the decoy letter. "And Nell is a little brick."

Dan Lynch probably died in the sewer, for he was never heard of again, although search was made.

The two murderers were taken back to Pennsylvania, where they suffered the penalty of their crime, and Nick Carter often refers to the case as the longest he ever handled.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 294) will contain "Nick Carter's Handicap; or, Victory Won in a Canter." A rattling racing story, boys, with excitement in every line and plenty of hard work for Nick and the rest of the Carters.



On the last lap, boys.
Contest drawing toward a close.
Remember the prizes we offer.
Look on page 31 if you don't.

Pat's Application for a Position.

(By Kenneth Gaynor, Wash.)

A bookseller in Cleveland advertised for a porter. A big, muscular Irishman walked into the shop, and glanced around. Finally his eye rested on a big sign over a table of books:

"Dickens' works all this week for \$3."

The Irishman read it thoughtfully, and then edged toward the door. The floor-walker asked pleasantly if there was something he wanted, and the applicant remarked, with a backward glance toward the sign:

"Oi come in t' git th' job, but Oi'll not care for it. Dickens kin worruk all th' week f'r three dollars if he wants to. Oi'll not. Ye'd better kape him."

And the visitor strode vigorously out.

Painting the Town Red.

(By Oliver Jacobson, Wis.)

The boys whom I am going to write about are two jolly, freckle-faced, innocent little darlings by the names of Sweet-Faced Sam and Jolly Jerry.

"Hello, Sam; what are you doing to-day?" asked Jerry.

"Nawthin'," said Sam, with an expression like an angle worm's.

"What do you say to painting the town red to-night? You know, it's the Fourth to-morrow," said Jerry.

"All right," answered Sam.

"Meet me at the corners," Jerry cried as they parted.

That night two boys might have been seen at the corners in Racine.

"Is everything all right?" Sam asked.

"Sure," answered Jerry.

They first went and got a Chinaman's laundry sign, and put it over a hotel. They changed the signs everywhere. Then they went to a church and started to ring the bell, and everybody was awakened. That night a traveler rode into town. He saw the hotel sign on the Chinaman's store, and pounded on the door. The Chinaman was at length awakened. He went out to see who was pounding.

"Whatee you doe that for?" he asked.

"You blamed old cuss, why don't you open when a feller pounds on de door?" the man asked.

"For what you poundee on de door?" the Chinaman asked.

"May I be tickled by a mosquito bite if you ain't the blamedest cuss I ever saw. Keep a hotel and then ask for what I pounded on the door. Why, you measly little monkey, do you really suppose that I am going to stand here all night? You think you kin fool me by being dressed like a Chinaman! Reminds me of a poem I once learned—

"You measly little monkey,
Do you really suppose
That for a Chinaman you pass
By wearing Chinese clothes?
If so, you're much mistaken,
My puny little friend,
For no tailor in creation
Your insignificance could mend.'"

With that the stranger left. The boys had been silent listeners, and when he left they rolled over and laughed and laughed.

Where Papa Came In.

(By Sam. Hartman, N. Y.)

"Whom do you love best?" asked a visitor of my sister Lilian, three and a half years old.

"Mamma," said the little one; "God next, and then my sister and brothers."

Noticing that she said nothing about her father, the visitor said:

"Why, Lilian, I am surprised at you! Where does your papa come in?"

Lilian raised her large eyes and innocently answered:

"Papa—why, papa comes in through the door."

Why He Resigned.

(By Wm. L. Hull, N. Y.)

There was a janitor of a city school who threw up his job one day, and when asked by a friend what the trouble was, said:

"Well, it's this: I'm honest, and I won't stand being slurred. If I ever found a pencil or anything else in the school when I was sweepin' out, I always gave it to the principal, but, just the same, the teachers or some one that's too mean to face me give me the slur."

"In what way?" asked a friend.

"Well, just this: A little while ago I saw written on the board, 'Find the common multiple.' Well, I didn't say a word, but I searched from garret to cellar, and I couldn't find the darn thing. Well, again, last night it said, 'Find the common divisor.' 'Well,' I says to myself, 'both them darn things be lost now, and I'll get blamed fer swipin' 'em, so I'll quit.'"

He Was Honest.

By I. Sapolsky, N. Y.

"Yes, sir," said Farmer Cornsstel, "if there's anything I do like an' admire, it's an honest man. An' that's why I'm so proud of our new neighbor down the road a piece. Ef ever there was an honest man he's one."

"Are you sure he's honest?"

"Cert'inly. One of those frank, generous kind."

"How do you know?"

"I traded hosses with him day before yesterday, an' reckon I got sixty dollars the best of him."

Where the Miracle Came In.

By Oliver Noach, Ariz.

"Well, Uncle Rasburry, how did you like the sermon?"

"It war a pow'ful sermon, Mars John."

"What was it about?"

"It war 'bout de mir'cle of seven thousand loaves and five thousand fishes bein' fed to the twelve 'Postles."

"Seven thousand loaves and five thousand fishes being fed to the twelve Apostles? But where does the miracle come in?"

Uncle Rasburry scratched his head a few moments meditatively. Then he replied:

"Well, Marse John, de mir'cle, 'cordin' to my preception of de circumstances, is dat dey all didn't bust."

Bad Luck.

By Harry Farmer, Victoria, Australia.

Pat had been out shooting, and was returning home when he was met by a friend.

"Well, Pat, have you been successful?" he asked.

"Shure," said Pat. "The only burrd I shot was a rabbit, and Oi knocked him down with a stick."

A Swimming Experience.

By H. M. Gilstein, Mass.

One day during vacation, I, with some other fellows, went for a swim. In the place where I live we have several places to swim in, but they are not deep enough, so we go to a wharf, where there is a channel and there we enjoy ourselves.

We were seeing who would be in the water first, and I got undressed and running to the end of the wharf, I

jumped in. Swimming around a little, I began to feel a trifle ill, and before I could swim to the wharf, I went down. I stayed under the water until it almost seemed a lifetime, and I was choking for breath and thinking that I would drown, when I came up, only to catch my breath a trifle and go down again. Again I choked and got mouthfuls of water, and when I came up I saw that I was near a log. I held on to the log until I felt better, and swimming over to the wharf, I dressed and, without saying anything to anybody, I went home.

"Two Ways."

By Morris Wartelsky, Pa.

An Irishman and a Frenchman were disputing over the nationality of a friend of theirs.

"I say," said the Frenchman, "that if he was born in France, he is a Frenchman."

"Begorra," said Pat, "if a cat should have kittens in the oven, would you call them biscuits?"

A Cinch.

By W. H. Walton, Texas.

One Irishman had been in America a long while, and when he met his brother at the dock, the following conversation took place:

Pat: "Faith and begaber, Mike, you have come to a good country. You make good wages and have to do no work."

Mike: "How is that?"

Pat: "Well, all you do is to pack the bricks up on top of a five-story building, and the man up there does all the work."

The Best Way.

By Rose Oliver, Pa.

Chimmy and Johnny were walking together one day, when Chimmy exclaimed:

"Say, Johnny, wot's der best way ter teach a girl to swim?"

"Well," said Johnny, in a wise manner. "First you take her gently by the hand, lead her gently to the water, put your arm gently round her waist and——"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Chimmy, disgustedly. "It's me sister."

"Oh!" said Johnny, carlessly. "Push her off the dock."

Why He Changed His Name.

By Albert Newton, W. Va.

We had been filling engagements through Ohio and Kentucky with the "Crawford Stock Company."

For three weeks our money had been held back, so we decided to go to the manager and ask for back salary.

We were playing to large houses at the time, and he told us he would pay the following Sunday morning.

When Sunday morning came he called us together and said:

"Now, I am going to pay you in alphabetical order. First, all names commencing with A will get their salary, then B and C, on down the alphabet."

Zeller, the slack wire performer, didn't like this form of paying, as the money was gone before it reached his name, and he quit the show and joined a street fair.

A short time after that I met him in a small town in Indiana. Stopping him, I started to shake hands with him, saying:

"Why, hello Zeller, old boy——" but before I finished, he said:

"Zeller h——, my name is Ajax."

And He Lost His Job.

By Rose Oliver, Pa.

A young man applied for a position one day in a store which was owned by a wealthy old gentleman.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"I have called to see about that position, sir," replied the young man.

"Have you any recommendations?" was the question next asked him.

"No, sir, but I have plenty of that which is on the sign on this side of your door, sir. I have lots of push."

"Well, young man," responded the old gentleman, severely, as he turned back to his desk, "it would pay you better to have what is on the other side—a pull."

Two From the Cream City.

By Frank Merrill, Milwaukee, Wis.

I.

A certain American "nigger," being brought before the judge for drunkenness, was asked:

"You again, eh?"

"Yes, sah!"

"What brought you here?"

"Two policemen, sah."

"Drunk, I suppose?"

"Yes, sah; both of them, sah."

"Ten dollars or ten days."

"Thank you, sah; I'll take the ten dollars, sah."

II.

A Milwaukee lad received a kodak as a birthday present, and on the first day used up all his films. Not knowing as yet how to develop his own pictures, he took them to a photographer.

A few days later he got them, but on opening the package at home, he saw films which he thought were not his own. He hurried back to the photographer and, rushing up to him, spluttered:

"Them ain't my flims. Nobody in our family had on a black shirt, and we ain't got no 'nigger' at our house, either."

After the photographer found out that the boy meant films by the word "flims," he proceeded to explain that white objects in photographs are black on plates or films. And the boy had his first lesson in photography.



\$1 worth of Tricks & Make-ups, sent postpaid for 25 cents stamps or silver. A nice Moustache or Full Beard, Irish or Side Whiskers, any color, bottle Spirit Gum to stick them on. Box of Burnt Cork to blacken up. Lin. Rubber Mouth, big teeth, secret & apparatus for performing the great vanishing half-dollar trick. This big offer is to get your address to send my large Ill. cat'g of plays, wigs, tricks & agts. latest novelties. Mention paper you saw this in and I will also put in a Heavy GOLD plate finger ring FREE, send size. Address Chas. Marshall, Mfr., Lockport, N.Y.



50 Prizes & 50 Prizes

There is a good chance for every boy in our new

Funny Story Contest

YOU ALL KNOW what rattling funny stories we printed in the recent contests. We are following them with another of the same kind. You have just as good a chance in this contest as any other boy in America, whether you entered the other contest or not. We want

More Funny Stories

Think of the funniest story of which you have ever heard, or the best joke. Write it out and send it to us—then look out for funny stories. We are publishing in this contest some of the best side-splitters that ever came out of the joke factory. Remember the prizes we are offering. In this contest there are

Fifty New Prizes

FIVE FIRST PRIZES The five boys who send in the five funniest stories will each receive **TEN BOOKS** from the list given in No. 280. The list includes some of the best detective stories, tales of adventure, and most interesting boys' stories ever written.

TEN SECOND PRIZES The ten boys who send in the next funniest stories will each receive any **FOUR BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280.

FIFTEEN THIRD PRIZES The fifteen boys who send us the next funniest stories will each receive any **THREE BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280. The twenty boys who send in next funniest stories will receive any **TWO BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280.

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS

This contest will close **September 1st**. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

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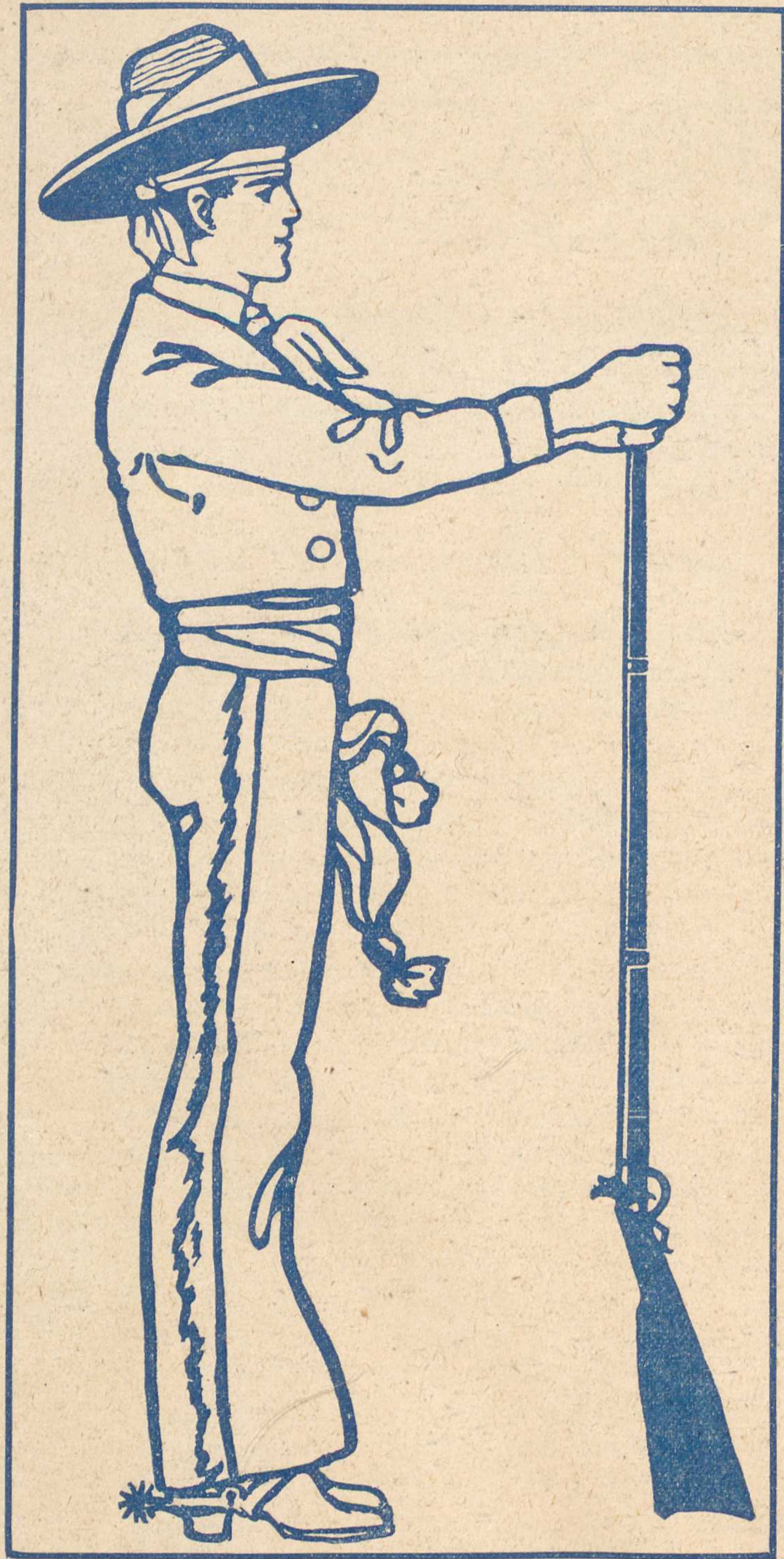
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